

Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

November 18, 2025

Theodore J. Elder, president
Eric J. Fiori, vice president
Caryn G. Abbott
Anthony W. Bertino, Jr.
Madison J. Bunting, Jr.
Joseph M. Mitrecic
Diana Purnell

Following a motion by Commissioner Bertino, seconded by Commissioner Bunting, the commissioners unanimously voted to meet in closed session at 9:00 a.m. in the Commissioners' Conference Room to discuss legal and personnel matters permitted under the provisions of Section 3-305(b)(1) and (7) of the General Provisions (GP) Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland and to perform administrative functions permitted under the provisions of Section GP 3-104. Also present at the closed session were Chief Administrative Officer Weston Young, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Candace Savage, County Attorney Roscoe Leslie, Legislative Analyst Charlene Sharpe, and Human Resources Director Stacey Norton. Topics discussed and actions taken included the following: a personnel update, hiring Richard Davey and Armani Handy-Thomas as grounds workers within the Maintenance Division, hiring Samantha Wells as emergency communications specialist trainee within Emergency Services, hiring Roberto Garcia-Gonzalez as a roads worker II within the Roads Division, transferring Tyler Brittingham from roads worker V to electronic services specialist I-installer, transferring Stacey Odell from a front office position to a back office position in Development Review and Permitting, and hiring Kimberly Granger as office assistant V in Development Review and Permitting.

Following a motion by Commissioner Bertino, seconded by Commissioner Bunting, the commissioners unanimously voted to adjourn their closed session at 9:25 a.m.

After the closed session, the commissioners reconvened in open session. Commissioner Elder called the meeting to order and, following a morning prayer by Hope Carmean of Whatcoat Church of Snow Hill and pledge of allegiance, announced the topics discussed during the morning closed session. Commissioner Elder announced that at the December 2 meeting, the commissioners would have a discussion on water and wastewater rates. He encouraged anyone who wanted more information on recent rate changes to attend.

The commissioners reviewed and approved the open and closed session minutes of their regularly scheduled meeting on November 4, 2025.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comments. Commissioner Fiori said his business recently experienced a horrific fire and that he was extremely grateful for first responders and wanted to thank them for their help. Commissioner Elder closed the floor.

The commissioners presented a proclamation celebrating American Education Week November 17-21, 2025, to Worcester County Public Schools Superintendent Annette Wallace and Worcester County Teachers Association President Beth Shockley-Lynch.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously approved by consent agenda item numbers two through nine as follows: approving a request to bid chemicals for Water and Wastewater, approving a memorandum of understanding for the MD611 Shared Use Path, awarding a bid for a Roads Division dump truck, awarding a contract for the Whaleyville Recycling Center concrete pad, approving an out of state travel request for Development Review and Permitting, approving the George Island Grant Agreement, approving a request to advertise for a public hearing for the FY26 budget amendment, and approving an FY26 marketing grant agreement.

Pursuant to the request of the Board of Education and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously approved the FY27 Worcester County Public Schools Capital Improvement Program.

The commissioners, upon a motion by Commissioner Abbott, voted unanimously to table a request from Sheriff Matt Crisafulli for a one grade increase for all sworn personnel from the rank of deputy sheriff to sergeant. The commissioners would like additional information on the costs of the proposal at the next meeting.

Following a request from Sheriff Crisafulli to create a new internal affairs investigator position, the commissioners discussed the need for requests for additional funding to come during budget development when possible. Commissioner Mitrecic brought up the possibility of sharing an internal affairs investigator with another local agency. Commissioner Purnell said she wasn't comfortable with a request for a significant amount of funding outside of the budget process. Commissioner Elder said he'd be willing to revisit the request during the budget process. A motion by Commissioner Mitrecic to approve the request failed 3-4, with Commissioners Mitrecic, Abbott and Fiori in favor and Commissioners Bertino, Bunting, Elder and Purnell opposed.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing for a map amendment to the Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area for 10702 Assateague Road submitted by Mark Cropper on behalf of Buck Brown's, LLC to reclassify 2.19 acres from Resource Conservation Area to Limited Developed Area. Natural Resources Administrator Brian Soper said staff recommended approval of the request, which met the necessary requirements.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comment.

Mr. Cropper advised that he wanted to adopt the staff report as his presentation. There being no further public comment, Commissioner Elder closed the public hearing. Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve the map amendment.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing for a map amendment to the Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area for Center Drive and North Road. The request was submitted by Mr. Cropper on behalf of the Estate of Olivia Harrison Phillips for the reclassification of 6.60 acres of Resource Conservation Area to Intensely Developed Area. Mr. Soper said the request met necessary requirements.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comment.

Mr. Cropper advised that he wanted to adopt the staff report as his presentation. There being no further public comment, Commissioner Elder closed the floor. Upon a motion by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve the map amendment.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing for Emergency Bill 25-06, a legislative bill to amend the maximum rate of the hotel rental tax to 6 percent. Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comment.

Richard Staub, representing the Ocean City Hotel Motel Restaurant Association, said he was in full support of the increase because the tax would be on visitors not locals and would help increase marketing dollars.

Ocean City resident Vince Gisriel said he opposed the increase. He said he didn't think the town needed additional revenue and that the resort's advertising budget had gotten out of hand. He added that part of the increased revenue would go to fund the construction of a sports complex.

Steve Green, a Berlin Town Council member, said he was in attendance with Jack Orris, another council member, to support the increase. He said the increase would help Berlin by bringing in \$25,000 in new revenue.

Ocean City Mayor Rick Meehan said Ocean City supported the increase because the town was seeing increased expenses because of tourism. He said the town was seeing increases in costs related to police, fire and EMS. He added that at 6%, the hotel rental tax would still be lower than the tax in places like Virginia Beach and Rehoboth. In response to a question from Commissioner Fiori, he confirmed that law enforcement vehicles alone would be costing the town \$4 million.

There being no further public comment, Commissioner Elder closed the floor.

Commissioner Mitrecic said Ocean City and other towns in Worcester County were asking for the increase, which would provide more funding for infrastructure and public safety. He added that the county still had one of the lowest room tax rates on the East Coast. Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve Emergency Bill 25-06.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing for Resolution 25-28, a resolution to raise the hotel rental tax from 5% to 6%. Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comment.

Chief Administrative Officer Weston Young said that following approval of the emergency bill to increase the cap on room tax from 5% to 6%, this resolution, which requires a unanimous vote, would actually raise the rate. He said the resolution was contingent on the 170,000 gallons per day sewer arrangement the county worked on with Ocean City.

Mr. Gisriel said he thought the studies related to bringing a sports complex to the area were riddled with red flags. He said sports activities had dropped noticeably in recent years.

Mr. Staub said that costs for hotels had gone up in recent years and that the ownership base of people involved in hospitality had increased. He said in order to support that many visitors the county needed to increase the room tax.

Mayor Meehan said he was present on behalf of the Mayor and Council to support the resolution, which he believes is a tool to build the relationship between Ocean City and Worcester County.

There being no further public comment, Commissioner Elder closed the floor. Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve Resolution 25-28.

The commissioners conducted a public hearing for a map amendment to the Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area submitted by Mr. Cropper on behalf of Island Resort Park Inc. for the

reclassification of 30.7 acres of land from Resource Conservation Area to Intensely Developed Area. Mr. Soper said staff recommended approval.

Commissioner Elder opened the floor to receive public comment. Mr. Cropper said the request was simply to facilitate the approvals the county had already granted for the Island Resort campground expansion. There being no further public comment, Commissioner Elder closed the public hearing.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve the map amendment.

The commissioners recessed for 10 minutes.

Pursuant to the request of Development Review and Permitting Director Jennifer Keener, Commissioners Abbott, Bertino, Bunting, Elder, Fiori, Mitrecic and Purnell introduced a text amendment that would set a minimum off-street parking clearance height and agreed to schedule a public hearing on the draft bill.

Public Works Director Dallas Baker provided an update on the Tanhouse Creek Bridge, which was built in 1992 and closed in August because it needs to be replaced. Pursuant to the recommendation for Mr. Baker, Commissioner Abbott made a motion to replace the bridge in kind for \$500,000. Following discussion among the commissioners regarding the longevity of fiberglass wrapping, Commissioner Abbott amended her motion in support of that option. The commissioners voted unanimously to spend \$600,000 to replace the bridge with upgraded Class A piles and fiberglass jacket wraps.

Pursuant to the request from Mr. Baker and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve a Mystic Harbour Wastewater Treatment Plant Over Expenditure Request related to reciprocal tariffs applied to the treatment plant's membranes.

Pursuant to the request from Mr. Baker and upon a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve Water and Wastewater end-of-year over expenditures in the Newark, Riddle Farm and Ocean Pines service areas. When asked when the noisy cleaning occurring at the Ocean Pines Wastewater Treatment Plant would be finished, Mr. Baker said it should be complete by the end of the week.

Pursuant to the request of Budget Officer Kim Reynolds and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve FY25 Water and Wastewater end-of-year budget transfers in the amount of \$475,244.

Pursuant to the request of Ms. Reynolds and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners unanimously approved Solid Waste year-end budget transfers in the amount of \$134,819.

Pursuant to the request of Human Resources Director Stacey Norton and upon a motion by Commissioner Bertino, the commissioners voted unanimously to have a classification and compensation study conducted by Bolton Partners, Inc. for \$50,000. Ms. Norton confirmed that it would include the Sheriff's Office as well as the Library and State's Attorney.

Pursuant to the request of Ms. Norton, the commissioners voted unanimously to approve a request to change the title of a senior budget accountant position to a grants and contract accountant.

The commissioners reviewed and discussed various board appointments. Upon nominations by Commissioner Fiori, the commissioners unanimously agreed to reappoint Joe Schanno to the Economic Development Advisory Board, appoint Alec French to the Planning Commission, appoint David Wells to the Recreation Advisory Board, reappoint Todd Ferrante to the Water and Sewer Advisory Council for West Ocean City, appoint Ann Fletcher to the Commission for Women, appoint Justice and Mary Anne Quillen to the Social Services Advisory Board and appoint Steve Katsanos to the Board of Zoning Appeals. Upon nominations by Commissioner Abbott, the commissioners unanimously agreed to appoint Robert Bunting to the Agricultural Preservation Advisory Board and reappoint Harry Wimbrow to the Economic Development Advisory Board. Upon a nomination by Commissioner Purnell, the commissioners unanimously agreed to reappoint Roy Case to the Electrical Examiners Board.

The commissioners conducted a work session with Development Review and Permitting Director Jennifer Keener and Consultant Michael Bayer on updates to the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Bayer reviewed the housing element and land use elements as well as the draft land use map. Commissioners pointed out that many of Worcester County's homes were second homes, not primary residences, but Mr. Bayer said the housing element figures were based on Census data. Commissioner Fiori questioned the sewer figures shown in the document and staff said they would review those. Mr. Bayer said he was going to do a final review of the Comprehensive Plan soon and that the commissioners' input would be given to staff so it could be worked in.

Commissioner Bertino thanked members of the Planning Commission for attending the recent work sessions. He encouraged property owners with questions about recent changes to water and wastewater rates to attend the December 2 meeting.

Commissioner Mitrecic highlighted the state's projected deficit for the coming year, which has increased to \$1.4 billion. He said the state was not likely to raise taxes but instead would make cuts, which will impact counties. Commissioner Mitrecic added that while he thought tying the sewer agreement with Ocean City to the hotel rental tax resolution wasn't appropriate he'd supported the hotel rental tax increase because it was important for Ocean City.

The commissioners answered questions from the press, after which they adjourned to meet again on December 2.